Roman Political History

1. Begins with Etruscans, a people that settled in Central Italy
   1. Traded with those in the W. Mediterranean and were attacked by Greeks and N. Europeans
   2. Rome’s geographic position was good - not on coast, but had access to water on the Tiber River, built on a series of hills, in the center of peninsula
2. Roman Republic begins when Roman aristocrats overthrew the last Etruscan king
   1. A republic has representatives from various constituencies, elected
   2. Roman forum built to house the government
      1. Consuls acted as executives - one civil and one military
      2. Senate passed laws and advised the Consuls
         1. Senate was made up of Patricians - rich, upper class of Rome
   3. As seen in other societies, there was a growing gap between rich and poor
      1. The Plebeians - the lower class - eventually gained more power, in the form of Tribunes - an office that could overrule the Consuls and the Senate
      2. The Tribunes also began writing laws for all Romans, not just themselves - these laws were called the Twelve Tables
   4. In times of crisis, the Senate could appoint a dictator, a leader with absolute power for 6 months
3. Rome, starting as a city state, begins to expand and take over all the Etruscan lands and beyond
   1. Iron is instrumental in this takeover
   2. Roman policy towards conquered people was generous - low taxes, lots of trade.
      1. The conquered people needed to provide soldiers to the Roman army
   3. After taking Italy, Rome turned its attention to the larger empires in the Mediterranean - Hellenistic Kingdoms and Carthage
      1. Rome conquers Antigonid and Ptolemaic Empires, but its biggest rival was Carthage, on the northern coast of Africa - allow their allies to rule these places in their stead
   4. Punic Wars against Carthage
      1. 1st (264-241 BCE)- Rome wins and takes Sicily, but leaves Carthage
      2. 2nd (218-201 BCE) - Hannibal, Carthage’s great military leader put Rome under siege for about 10 years - technically a Carthaginian victory
      3. 3rd (149-146 BCE) - Rome wipes Carthage off the map - sets up a colony there called Africa
4. Rome becomes an empire
   1. Again, like Greece and China, Rome had problems with distribution of land
      1. In Rome, there were giant plantations that provided food for the city called Latifundia
         1. Patricians owned these plantations and slaves worked on them
      2. Small farmers could not compete with the plantations and it drove many farmers into slavery
      3. Two Patricians, Tiberius and Gaius Gracchus, attempted to redistribute the land through the Senate.
         1. Both were assassinated for trying to do this.
   2. Military leaders began to jockey for power and recruited poor farmers to be soldiers
      1. These soldiers became extremely loyal to their generals
      2. The two top generals at the time were Gaius Marius (for the Plebeians) and Sulla (for the Patricians)
      3. Sulla wins and starts to implement policies that strengthen the rich
         1. This does not fix the problems between rich and poor or land distribution
         2. It also doesn’t endear him to the vast majority of Romans
   3. Julius Caesar, the military consul, begins to make political statements and the civil consul, Pompey, fears his ambition.
   4. Pompey gets the Senate to recall him and disbands Caesar’s army
      * 1. Caesar decides to invade Rome. He defeats Pompey and takes power in Rome (46 BCE).
   5. Caesar enacts many policies meant to help the poor - giving them land (in distant territories) and putting the poor to work building public works
      1. Conservative Senators assassinate him in 44 BCE
   6. Caesar’s assassination starts a civil war between Caesar’s friends vs. his assassins
      1. Caesar’s friends win, although the members of this coalition fight after their victory
         1. Octavius (Caesar’s grand-nephew and adopted son) vs. Marc Antony (Caesar’s top lieutenant)
            1. Octavian wins and becomes the first Roman Emperor
5. Roman Empire
   1. Octavian takes the title “Caesar”
   2. He merges traditional modes of government with Caesar’s rule
      1. Elites fill these important government positions
   3. He also made all decisions and made himself the head of the military - everything goes through Octavian
6. Pax Romana (27 BC to 180 AD)
   1. Octavian’s rule ushers in a period of stability called the Pax Romana - the Roman Peace
      1. No one within the empire attempted to disrupt the government
   2. Rome becomes an Empire of Laws
      1. Concepts like, innocent until proven guilty and the right to challenge accusers developed here
      2. This uniform throughout the empire - similar to what Darius did in Persia
   3. This was also a period of economic prosperity (which probably limited disruptions, too)
      1. Roads linked N. Africa to Sub-Saharan Africa - 50,000 miles of roads built in the empire
         1. African roads linked Rome to trade networks in SSA that brought luxury goods to the Roman Empire
7. Roman Economy
   1. Roman roads and stability/security encouraged and strengthened trade
   2. Like Greece, Rome traded FOR grain and moved it all over the empire
      1. Some cities within the empire imported grain so that they could focus on growing other crops, like fruits and vegetables.
      2. Competitive advantage - only produce what you’re good at and trade that stuff for the rest
   3. The Roman army and navy kept the land and sea safe for trade
      1. Everyone benefitted from this, even poor, rural people had fine products
      2. Roman merchants personally traded as far away as India or E. Africa
   4. The city of Rome was probably the most advanced and wealthy of the age
      1. Aqueducts brought in water to the city, concrete was invented
      2. Many stadia, bathhouses, fountains, temples, sewers made the city more livable
      3. These were the things that the poor were contracted to build
      4. In addition, Rome needed merchants, shopkeepers, food service: all of which caused the economy of Rome to surge
         1. These people came from far away in order to have a better future in Rome
8. Roman Society and Religious Thought
   1. The center of Roman society was the nuclear family - like other societies (China)
      1. In theory, the male head of household had absolute authority over all other family members
      2. In practice, women had a lot of domestic authority (basically ran the domestic part of the household - slaves, servants, etc)
         1. Eventually, women could hold land, property and businesses
   2. Roman Religion
      1. Much was taken from surrounding cultures, especially Greece
         1. Gods and philosophy, especially the philosophy of Stoicism
            1. Cicero was the principal Stoic thinker
            2. Resist the urge to hide from society, live in accordance to nature and reason, justice was the highest duty and scorn those that become wealthy unjustly
      2. Religions of salvation
         1. Gave people a sense of purpose when their lives were generally pretty bad
         2. Mitharism - emphasized strength, courage and discipline; popular in the military, really just for men
            1. Adapted from a Persian sun gold cult that promises union with god after death
         3. Cult of Isis - most popular during the Republic and early Empire - men and women allowed, a protective deity that helped people during their daily lives, heaven was a reward
      3. Jews and Christianity
         1. Many Jews still lived in the regions near their ancient kingdoms of Israel and Judah
         2. They still deeply believed in their monothesism
         3. Romans allowed for religious toleration, as long as you practiced the official Roman religion, paid taxes and offerings to it.
            1. Jews refused to do this.
         4. Some Jews violently resisted Roman rule, while others believed that a savior would come to deliver them from Roman oppression
         5. Jesus of Nazareth was seen by some as a savior
      4. Jesus
         1. Developed a large following and taught about the love of god and for each other - strictly monotheistic
         2. The Romans considered some of his teachings to be treasonous, for example - The Kingdom of God is at hand
            1. This sounds like someone is trying to overthrow the government, by someone considered to be the King of Jews by some.
         3. The Romans executed him like they would any other traitor - cruxifixion
         4. Following Jesus’ death, his followers compiled his teachings and attempted to live by his moral standards
            1. An important early leader was Paul - who was a Roman citizen and able to travel anywhere in the Empire

He was one of the first to say Christianity was separate from Judaism

* + - 1. Also important to note is that there many early Christian churches and no uniform Christianity - in fact, it was considered to just be a sect of Judaism by the Romans

1. Fall of Rome
   1. There are many possible explanations, but many of them begin with the Barracks Emperors
      1. From 235-284 CE, 26 emperors from the military took the throne, many died violently - this was a period of high instability in the empire
   2. Diocletian reasserts stability in the Emperorship (284-305)
      1. Realizes the Empire is too big to govern and divides it in half - Eastern and Western Empires - each with a co-emperor and a lieutenant
         1. This sounds good in theory, but really only creates 4 people who want all the power
   3. One of these four guys, Constantine, takes all the power in 306
      1. He moves the capital from Rome to a small Greek town called Byzantium, later renamed Constantinople
         1. He did this because it was in a better defensive position and was closer to trade routes, he was also from this region
      2. He reunited the empire in 330 with him in total control
   4. Rome was constantly fighting the Persians and Germanic tribes to the north of the empire
      1. Rome paid these Germanic people to fight for them - mercenaries are not very loyal
      2. When Attilla the Hun invaded northern Europe, he drove the Germanic people south into the Roman Empire (440s - 450s)
      3. The Germanic invasions eventually weakened the Western part of the empire until it collapsed in 476 when Rome was conquered by a Germanic general named Odoacer
         1. The Eastern part of the empire continued for another 1000 years
         2. The Western part of the empire was controlled by various Germanic peoples - Franks become the most important and become the French
2. Growth of Christianity
   1. Constantine converts to Christianity and issues Edict of Milan in 313, which legalizes Christianity
      1. Ends 300 years of persecution of Christians and their faith
   2. Emperor Theodosius makes Christianity the official Roman religion in the late 4th century
   3. Christian Philosophy
      1. St. Augustine reconciled Christianity with Greek philosophy like Stoicism and Plato
      2. It also attempted to make Christianity more appealing to average people and used terms that they would understand
      3. New Testament was composed to provide a uniform Christianity
         1. Prior to this, communities did not have the same belief system - this was an attempt to create orthodoxy - correct thinking or teaching
   4. Institutional Church
      1. Patriarchs in 5 major cities (Rome, Antioch, Alexandria, Jerusalem and Constantinople) made Church doctrine
      2. Bishops led city congregations
         1. The bishops met in councils to decide upon controversial church issues, like “What *was* Jesus?” at the Council of Nicaea in 325.
            1. It was decided that he was both human and divine, although other groups continued to say he was mostly one or the other
      3. The Bishop of Rome becomes the leader of the Church and is called the Pope
         1. The Pope organizes the city of Rome after the collapse, because no other institution or organization could do this - no government (Pope Simplicius)
         2. He starts the process of converting the Germanic people to Christianity
         3. Similar to the role the Brahmin played in India without a stable government